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Pearl and the psychosomatics of dream: Parasomnias as narrative strategies in medieval dream visions

Abstract: To say that dreams and visions were significant in the Middle Ages is an understatement, though laying too much importance on them was, in its time, fraught with the potency of transgression, as the very process of dreaming implied the loss of control over the direction of one's anima. Likewise, just where and from whom exactly dreams came and what it was that they portended, if at all, were often debatable issues in Christian philosophy. While the Book of Deuteronomy expressly forbade to pay attention to dreams (18:10–11), they were intensely studied and, as dream visions, were a frequent vehicle of medieval poetic narratives. By applying contemporary clinical discoveries and discussions of various types of parasomnias, this paper intends to view medieval dream visions, in particular *Pearl*, as exploring the narrative potential of parasomniac experience. The aim here is, therefore, to examine the influence of what tentatively shall be called here "narrative psychosomatics", that is the influence of the parallels between parasomniac experience associated with sleep disorders and those elements of dream visions' plots that may bear narrative semblance to them. Two chief questions are to be addressed in the course of this paper: to what an extent contemporary understanding of dream psychosomatics is applicable to a discussion of narrative techniques in medieval dream vision literature; and whether the potentially parasomniac elements of dream vision narratives increase, signify or admonish transgressive elements in dream visions.

Keywords: dream, dream vision, parasomnias, psychosomatics, narrative strategies, *Pearl* (14th c. poem)

It is symptomatic, perhaps, that the recorded history of literature composed in English begins with a dream vision. Whatever we are to think of the truth behind Bede's account of Cædmon's dream commanding him to sing verses in his native tongue, the tale is in many ways emblematic of medieval, and not only medieval, treatment of dreaming as a form of sacred communication. However, at least one other aspect is present there implicitly, as much as it is present in many other later medieval dream visions; it is that of potential condemnation. The dream places an obligation on Cædmon to follow the divinely preordained plan, which remains in close relation with the focus of his hymn on praising God's *modgeþanc*, "thinking", or, essentially, God's intentions. Cædmon's dream, therefore, both condemns

him to become a poet and, although in no way does Bede imply it, it serves as a condemnatory warning against any opposition to the vision sent to Cædmon in his sleep.

This initial reference to *Cædmon's Hymn* serves as an epigraph here. It is in its dual understanding of condemnation as prescriptive and descriptive that the present paper intends to focus on later medieval dream visions. In doing so, its aim is to examine the influence of what tentatively shall be called here "narrative psychosomatics", that is the influence of the parallels between parasomniac experience associated with sleep disorders and those elements of dream visions' plots that may bear narrative semblance to them. Two chief questions are to be addressed in the course of this paper: to what an extent is contemporary understanding of dream psychosomatics applicable to a discussion of narrative techniques in medieval dream vision literature; and whether the potentially parasomniac elements of dream vision narratives increase, signify or admonish transgressive elements in dream visions? To address these points, I shall initially provide an overview of what is described as parasomniac experience by modern medicine and relate this to late classical and medieval discussions of dreams, in order to eventually apply these points to an exemplary medieval dream vision upon which the Middle English *Pearl* is constructed. It is important to stress that the understanding of its narrative elements as instances of narrative psychosomatics in no way should be understood as an attempt at seeing in *Pearl* account of some potentially real dream. The discussion is thus not intended as a form of clinical dream archaeology, or as a way of discussing the poem as possessing instances of narrative disorders. Rather, the similarities to the sleep disorders and their psychosomatic characteristics that the medieval dream visions display should be understood here solely as types of narrative strategies that may have – although by no means do we imply here that this is their only source – originated from the somatic experience related to sleep. The fact that the parasomniac phenomena selected for this analysis either happen or are especially closely relatable to the phases in-between sleep and reality makes them particularly prone to be associated with hallucinations, in which the sphere of the real coincides with the fantastic. Such experiences, therefore, may have been particularly conducive to the creation of supernatural elements and unrealistic transitions in the tradition of medieval dream visions.

Sleep and dream disorders have in various ways been attested in the earliest recorded accounts of dreams and sleep (Sullivan – Guilleminault 2010: 3). They remain among the central issues for contemporary somatic and psychosomatic medicine, psychiatry, psychology, somnology and they continue to pose questions that are yet to be answered (Sullivan – Guilleminault 2010: 7). Before they are

discussed in the contexts of medieval dream visions, attention should be drawn to how parasomniac phenomena are understood and defined in modern clinical medicine. Parasomnia is the general term which is used to refer to a number of sleep dysfunctions, however the focus here will be on three categories of parasomniac manifestations that occur as either hypnagogic or hypnapompic types of experience, that is happening either while falling asleep and beginning to dream or around the time of awakening. These three types of parasomnias are lucid dreaming, sleep paralysis, and sleep starts, known also as hypnic jerks. All of them share specific forms of somatic reactions that are psychoactive and thus potentially hallucinatory.

Somnologists describe lucid dreaming as an exceptionally disturbing sensation of simultaneous awareness of the dream and of the fact that it is being dreamt. A recent study on the clinical characteristic of parasomnias describes it as "the experience of achieving conscious awareness of dreaming while still asleep. Although, lucid dreams are generally thought to arise from nonlucid dreams in REM sleep, it has been demonstrated that these occur in a distinct state with features of both REM sleep and waking" (Ramtekkar – Ivanenko – Kothare 2013: 161). Moreover, with a considerable degree of training, it appears that it is possible to enter the state of lucidity while dreaming (Schredl 2010: 156; Warren 2007: 111–158). Lucid dreaming is often associated with the unpleasant sensation of some kind of foreign presence in the space where the dreamer dreams, which somnologists link to the accounts of demonic company or of sexual intercourses perpetrated upon female and male dreamers by incubi or succubi respectively (Schredl 2010: 153).

Lucid dreaming is frequently also accompanied by another distressing sensation, that of sleep paralysis, in which not only is wakefulness, as it were, superimposed on whatever is being dreamt and vice versa, but which is also the state prone to produce hallucinations. Viewed as a medical condition, "recurrent isolated sleep paralysis represents the presence of skeletal muscle atonia inappropriately in the setting of wakefulness. The episodes occur most frequently at the beginning of the sleep period, with another peak near the end of the sleep period. While gross movements are impossible, the individual is often able to open his or her eyes and remains aware of the surroundings" (Vioritto – Hussain 2013: 20). Jeff Warren, in his study of consciousness, speaks of sleep paralysis as an example of the malfunctioning of those of the brain mechanism that determine one's awareness of being awake and alert: "with sleep paralysis, the person wakes up out of REM sleep and tries to rise, but their brain stem is slower to make the transition and continues to inhibit muscle activity… In addition, body paralysis is often paired with what are called 'hypnagogic hallucinations' – aural and visual elements from the dream world superimposed overtop of the waking world" (Warren 2007: 32). Among

manifestations of sleep paralysis especially characteristic are the recurrent dreams in which the dreamer is in some manner incapacitated despite strong efforts to battle such incapacitation, for instance, not being able to move or not moving fast enough in some critical circumstances.

Sleep paralysis is frequently marked by narrative experiences of nightmarish nature on the part of the dreamer and the nightmares suffered have the potential to be imprinted on the dreamer's memory. In their study of parasomnias, Erick N. Vioritto and Aatif M. Hussain comment on the connection between sleep paralysis and nightmares, pointing to their propensity for being remembered: "frequent awakening from sleep with recall of frightening dreams is the hallmark of nightmare disorder. There is full-alertness on awakening without confusion or disorientation, in contrast to sleep terrors where the individual will appear anxious and fearful but also have impaired responsiveness. The individual with nightmare disorder has clear recall of his or her dream" (Vioritto – Hussain 2013: 20).

Finally, one other markedly somatic phenomenon associated with parasomnias should be mentioned here with a view to its later application in the discussion of the narrative techniques in the selected medieval dream narrative. It is known as either a hypnic jerk, hypnagogic start or somnolescent start, as it is most often experienced at the onset of sleep (Chokroverty – Gupta 2010: 229). Categorising it as a "sleep-wake transition disorder", Shelly K. Weiss refers to hypnic jerks as "sleep starts" and discusses their occurrences along with the occurrences of sleep talking: "Sleep starts are sudden, brief contractions of the legs, sometimes also involving the arms and head that occur at sleep onset. … Sleep starts are frequently associated with a perception of falling or a sensory flash or a visual hypnagogic dream or hallucination. The sleep start may result in the individual wakening with an awareness of the event, or in the case of an individual who is co-sleeping, it may not waken the person with the sleep start, but disturb the bed-partner's or parent's sleep" (Weiss 2013: 140). The startling sensation of suddenness associated with an understandably disturbing perception of falling that the hypnic jerks convey are also reported to occur simultaneously with possible sensory flashes, visual hypnagogic dreams or hallucinations (Weiss 2013: 140) and they may lead to sudden transitions or lacunae in whatever is being dreamt.

At this stage two points should perhaps be made. On the one hand, it already may be clearly visible that the clinical assessment, categorization and examination of parasomniac experiences have a number of elements in common with what may be described as typical ingredients and narrative strategies of literary dream visions. What somnological medicine and psychology describe as lucid dreaming, sleep paralysis and hypnic jerks is, in a number of ways, observable in dream visions and dream narratives and, understandably perhaps, it may be

also associated with their admonishing and condemnatory aspects, which will be addressed later in the course of this paper. On the other hand, a question should be posed about the degree of comparability between the way people sleep and, with all their parasomnias, dream their dreams now and the ways of sleeping and dreaming in the past. Therefore, before we turn to the examination of *Pearl*, we must revisit several most influential late classical and medieval perspectives on dreams and sleep. It is there that we shall be able to observe not only remarkable similarities to modern clinical descriptions of parasomnias, but also the importance laid on admonitory understanding of dreams.

Anyone who delves into the study of dreams in the Middle Ages as well as the medieval authors who resorted to the use of dreams as narrative strategies must be and must have been especially conscious and apprehensive of the biblical warning against dream divination. The Book of Deuteronomy cautions Israelites against such detestable practices: "Neither let there be found among you any one … that consulteth soothsayers, *or observeth dreams* and omens, neither let there be any wizard, Nor charmer, nor any one that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune-tellers, or that seeketh the truth from the dead. For the Lord abhorreth all these things" (Deut 18: 10–12). Medieval approaches to dreams, as Stephen Kruger in his *Dreaming in Middle Ages* observes, were thus characterized by a considerable degree of ambivalence and tension between the fear of transgression and the fascination combined with the hope for some form of dream interpretation. The tension within the medieval understanding of the role of dreams, within their liminality between the quotidian and the otherworldly and the potentially demonic and sacred origins is visible in the number of medieval dream manuals, dreamlunars and dream-books on the one hand and the numerous laws against divination on the other (Kruger 2005: 7–16). The duality of medieval approaches to dreams is also noted by Kruger among three late classical and early medieval dream commentaries: Calcidius' early fourth century *Commentarius in Timaeum* (*Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*), Macrobius's early fifth century *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* (*Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*), possibly the most influential of dream treatises, and Gregory the Great's sixth century *Dialogii* (*Dialogues*). All three authors, paving way for later commentators, understand dreams as having divine, mundane and demonic sources: "Rather than asserting that all dream experience was either divine or mundane, such authors took a more inclusive approach, accepting the possibility that, under different sets of circumstances, both divine (externally- inspired) and mundane (internally-stimulated) dreams can occur" (Kruger 2005: 19).

Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, arguably the most frequently referred to work on dreams in the Middle Ages, famously differentiates between

several types of signification offered by dreams, dividing them into two large groups: the credible dreams, that is those that convey important messages and the dreams of no prophetic meaning. In the first category are the enigmatic dream (*somnium*), the prophetic dream (*visio*) and the oracular dream (*oraculum*), that is an oneiric message from one's parent, revered man or a god. The category of insignificant dreams comprises nightmares (*insomnia*) and apparitions (*visa*) of which Macrobius says that they may result from mental or physical distress or anxieties (Macrobius 1990: 87–88). Macrobius's comments on the latter group of dreams are reminiscent of the clinical descriptions of parasomnias by contemporary somnologist and his explanation of the nature of apparitions (*visa*) clearly resembles the characteristic of lucid dreaming:

> *Φάντασμα* vero, hoc est visum, cum inter vigiliam et adultam quietem in quadam, ut aiunt, prima somni nebula adhuc se vigilare aestimans qui dormire vix coepit aspicere videtur irrventes in se vel passim vagantes formas a natura seu magnitudine seu specie discrepantes variasque tempestates rerum vel laetas vel turbulentas. In hoc genere est et *ἐπιάλτης*, quem publica persuasio quiescentes opinatur invadere et pondere suo pressos ac sentientes gravare.
>
> (Macrobius 2015: I, iii, 7)

> The apparition (*phantasma* or *visum*) comes upon one in the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so-called "first cloud of sleep". In this drowsy condition the dreamer thinks he is still fully asleep and imagines he sees spectres rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing. To this class belongs the *incubus*, which according to popular belief rushes upon people in sleep and presses them with a weight which they can feel.
>
> (Macrobius 1990: 89)

The focus on the phase between wakefulness and dream, the mentions of spectral images present in the vicinity of the dreamer, and the indication to the sensation of a foreign presence, an incubus, all bring to mind the clinical descriptions cited earlier, thus confirming the assumption that the psychosomatics of sleep and dream in the past was not, in its essence, very different from their contemporary somnological cognizance. Granted, what remains different is the belief in the superhuman origins of dreams and the belief in their signification, what is comparable, however, regardless whether it is thought to be of supernatural or hallucinatory provenance, is the narrative potential of such critical dream moments.

Confirmations of the similarity of oneiric experience of the past to that of the present may also be found elsewhere. St. Augustine's *Confessions*, for instance, not only speak of lucid dreaming, but of the apprehension about the possibility of the

loss of control that such a state brings, a fact familiar from the present-day clinical reports on parasomnias. Augustine's dread of such a state is palpable:

> Et tantum valet imaginis illius inlusio in anima mea in carne mea, ut dormienti falsa visa persuadeant quod vigilanti vera non possunt. numquid tunc ego non sum, domine deus meus? et tamen tantum interest inter me ipsum et me ipsum, intra momentum, quo hinc ad soporem transeo vel huc inde retranseo! ubi est tunc ratio, qua talibus suggestionibus resistit vigilans, et si res ipsae ingerantur, inconcussus manet? numquid clauditur cum oculis? numquid sopitur cum sensibus corporis? et unde saepe etiam in somnis resistimus, nostrique propositi memores atque in eo castissime permanentes nullum talibus inlecebris adhibemus adsensum?
>
> (Augustine 1999: 10.30)

> The illusion of that image is of such avail in my soul and in my flesh, that mere visions persuade me in sleep as the realities could not persuade me when I am awake. Then am I not I [in sleep], O Lord my God? Yet there is such a difference between myself and myself, divided by that moment in which from waking I fall asleep, from sleeping I wake! Where is my reason, which when I am awake resits such suggestions, and would remain unshaken were the realities themselves presented? Is my reason closed when my eyes close? Does it fall asleep with the bodily senses?
>
> (Augustine 2006: 212)

Augustine is then torn between the idea that dreams may be important, that they involve significant mental activity and that they may be truth-telling, and between the conception that demons could insert their ethereal bodies into the human body and present pictures of wickedness to human imagination. Did sexual dreams, for instance, imply consent to the acts that the waking mind would not agree to? Augustine's answers are negative, but the fact that he poses such questions is telling (cf. O'Donnell 2005: 152–154). The comments, which Augustine voices in relation to unchaste dreams, focus on the questions of moral responsibility for one's thoughts and actions while dreaming and thus for one's psychosomatic behaviour in what is on the one hand the state of powerlessness and, on the other, the state of heightened consciousness, albeit taking place on quite a different level (cf. Haji 1999: 166–180). Understandably, Augustine expresses here the uneasiness and, what is even more likely, revulsion about the possible demonic origins of dreams. However, the quotation from *Confessions* is another confirmation of the possible parasomniac experience in the passages from wakefulness to sleep and vice versa. Dreams may be morally disconcerting, yet it is passing into them or out of them that appears truly disturbing for Augustine.

As may be expected, whenever medieval dream discourse is encountered, we also come across ascertainment of the import of dreams as visions, omens and prophecies. Doubtlessly aware of and familiar with Macrobius's commentaries on

Somnium Scipionis, Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies*, itself a work whose medieval weight and popularity can hardly be overestimated, specifies the seven kinds of prophecies received and experienced in dreams and visions by biblical prophets. They are listed in Book VII: the first is ecstasy (*extasis*), that is passing beyond one's mind, the second is vision (*visio*), then comes the dream proper (*somnium*), with Jacob's dream as the example. The fourth type is a prophecy spoken through a cloud (*per nubem*), the fifth is a voice from heaven (*vox de caelo*), the sixth happens when an oracle is received (*accepta parabola*), whereas the seventh, highest form of a prophetic dream, is being replete with the Holy Spirit (*repletio sancti Spiritus*) (Isidore 2012: VII, viii, 33; Isidore 2006: 166). The second major reference to dreams made by Isidore is in connection with their admonishing value. In this, Isidore connects dreams to monsters as portents: *Vult enim deus interdum ventura significare per aliqua nascentium noxia, sicut et per somnos et per oracula, qua praemoneat et significet quibusdam vel gentibus vel hominibus futuram cladem; quod plurimis etiam experimentis probatum est* (Isidore 2012: XI, iii, 4), "God sometimes wants to indicate what is to come through some defects in newborns, and also through dreams and oracles, by which he may foreshadow and indicate future calamity for certain peoples or individuals" (Isidore 2006: 244). Isidore's understanding of the meaning of dreams is then taut between prophecies and terrifying omens, but even the latter, much like the monsters Isidore mentions in the same passage, ultimately come as divine warnings.

Finally, before the attention is moved from the parallels between medieval dream theories and parasomnias to a case study of textual psychosomatics in a dream vision, among the letters of the twelfth century mystic, Hildegard von Bingen, we find an explanation that combines an insight into her experience of visions with a categorical statement that they should not be treated as dreams, but as altogether different phenomena. Perhaps what sounds as a form of disclaimer on Hildegard's part results from the fear that her visions may be associated with the potentially demonic provenance of dreams and from the desire to emphasise that whatever she experiences is a sensation that is external to her. The explanation she provides is an answer to the question about the nature of her visions posed by Guibert-Martin, a Benedictine monk from the abbey of Gembloux who enquired of her: "Do you, for example, receive your visions in a dream while asleep, or do they come to you in an ecstatic state [cf. Acts 11.5] while awake?" (Hildegard 1998: 20; letter 103). The letter is dated to 1175 and Hildegard, who is seventy-seven then, answers in exalted words:

> I merely report those things I received in a supernal vision. [...] I am now more than seventy years old. But even in my infancy [...] I was possessed of this visionary gift in my

> soul, and it abides with me still up to the present day. In these visions my spirit rises, as God wills, to the heights of heaven and into the shifting winds, and it ranges among various peoples, even those very far away. And since I see in such a fashion, my perception of things depends on the shifting of the clouds and other elements of creation. Still, I do not hear these things with bodily ears, nor do I perceive them with the cogitations of my heart or the evidence of my five senses. I see them only in my spirit, with my eyes wide open, and thus I never suffer the defect of ecstasy in these visions. And, fully awake, I continue to see them day and night.
>
> (letter 103r; Hildegard 1998: 21–22)

And yet, as the mystic safeguards herself by saying that her visions are to be understood as her genuine experience, albeit perceived in a parasensory manner, it is tempting to see her description of the visions as similar to the present-day descriptions of lucid dreaming. Perhaps we may find here yet another instance corroborating the fact that it is possible to discuss medieval understanding of dreams in the way analogous to contemporary interpretations of parasomnias and psychosomatic experiences.

With the evidence supplied by the clinical discussion of parasomnias and the provided selection of medieval commentaries on the roles and meanings of dreams, it appears that what medieval dream commentators related to as the prophetic and admonishing aspects of dreams may be interpreted from the perspective of sleep disorders, since such sleep disorders, or the psychosomatic sensations connected with dreaming, are the marks of the heightened awareness of one's dreaming state. Visions, hallucinations, somniloquy, i.e. talking in sleep, sensations of the loss of control are all classifiable by contemporary somnology as forms of parasomnias. They are also brought about by one's intensified self-awareness. Remembering, however, about the correspondence between myths, narratives and dreams that was emphasised by the distinguished comparative mythographer, Joseph Campbell (Campbell 1988: 14–15), it is clear that dream mechanisms, and especially those related to parasomnias, may serve as narrative frameworks of literary fiction. The dream vision form, so popular across medieval Europe as either a motif or a genre in its own right, seems to owe much to the experience, which, judging from medieval dream-books, is comparable to the practice and sensation of dreaming.

Dream visions, including *Pearl* (cf. Hieatt 1965: 139–145; Bogdanos 1983), have naturally attracted much attention among the scholars, both as the form and as the subject matter of medieval narratives. It is hardly surprising, given the variety that the dream form allowed and given its interpretative potential. In his study of medieval narrative genres, Tony Davenport succinctly states that "most writers on medieval dream poetry stress the great variety of subjects possible, from apocalyptic visions to erotic adventures, fanciful bird debates, political satires, and

tableaux of moral abstractions, and the ways in which dream allows mixtures of traditions and styles" (Davenport 2004: 193). Bearing in mind the vastness of the source and critical material on medieval dream visions, the closing section of this paper will be devoted to a comparative consideration of a quintessential dream vision poem, *Pearl*, and in particular those of its features which are interpretable as narratively modelled on the semblances to psychosomatic and parasomniac states and sensations.

Pearl, ostensibly narrated as a poeticised dream, makes use of the dream form on several general levels, much like other dream visions. The dream appears here as an explanatory technique since the poem's narrative layer is explained as made possible because of falling asleep and dreaming. In this aspect the dream pattern serves as an opening and closing strategy, framing the poem between the hypnagogic and hypnopompic moments. And, simultaneously, it establishes the poem as a framed narrative, with the figure of the Dreamer being both the narrator, who on one level is, as it were, above the narrative, and, on another, he is one of its characters. As is the case with the experience of dreams, the narrator of *Pearl* is then at once extra- and intradiegetic; he is a commentator and a participant. Thus, paradoxically, although characteristically for the medieval form of dream vision, resorting to the use of the dream lends the poem convincing air in the depiction of the fantastic and supernal vision. This paradoxical verisimilitude in the depiction of the dream vision is, as we shall see, also present in the ocurrences of the three types of parasomniac elements – lucid dreaming, sleep paralysis and hgypnic jerks – and, to a degree, in the renditions of the psychosomatic experience in *Pearl*.

According to Macrobius's classification, the poem depicts an oracular dream, that is a dream *quidem cum in somnis parens vel alia sancta gravisve persona seu sacerdos vel etiam deus aperte eventurum quid aut non eventurum, faciendum vitandumve denuntiat* (Macrobius 2015: I, iii, 8), "in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or to avoid" (Macrobius 1990: 90). In *Pearl* the situation is creatively reversed, since it is the daughter that admonishes the parent, but the poem's dream is predominantly cautionary, at times reproachful and generally instructive. Were we to apply contemporary clinical study of dreams to it, *Pearl*, in all likelihood, would be understood as an account of a lucid dream, with the elements of control over the dream, which some dreamers are able to exercise. The Dreamer is well aware of the fact that he is dreaming and he is in a state that may be called the state of expectant sleep:

> Fro spot my spyryt ther sprang in space;
> My body on balke ther bod in sweven.

My goste is gon in Godes grace
In aventure ther mervayles meven

(61–64; *Pearl* 1996: 3)

His spirit is raised although his body remains *in sweven*, asleep, on the grassy mound, while his soul is expecting *mervayles*. As in a lucid dream, he is thus fully aware of being asleep, or rather of entering into the dream in a state of hypnagogia. The Dreamer expects the dream to be oracular, while his body is motionless and uncontrollable. All of these are recognizable marks of a lucid dream and the description of the Dreamer's state corresponds to clinical descriptions of a controlled entry into the REM phase. Incidentally, such entrances into the world of the dream are also characteristic of other dream visions, notably of Chaucer's *House of Fame* (cf. ll. 111–120). Quite characteristic for a pleasant, controlled lucid dreams are also hypnopompic phases signified by a sense of melancholy and wistfulness that the dream comes to an end. The Dreamer of *Pearl* experiences a similar state:

Me payed ful ille to be outfleme
So sodenly of that fayre regioun,
Fro alle tho syghtes so quyke and queme.
A longeyng hevy me strok in swone,
And rewfully thenne I con to reme…

(1177–1181; *Pearl* 1996: 45)

The lines express sorrow and *longeyng hevy* for the *fayre regioun* which the Dreamer abruptly abandoned since the moment of wakefulness here is rapid and not gradual.

The moments of falling in and out of sleep and in and out of dream are marked in the poem by a pair of incidents that bears resemblance to another parasomniac experience associated with psychosomatic sensations. Although the Dreamer is aware of an impending dream, the entrance into and exit from the dream-state are sudden and startling. In their abruptness they resemble the parasomniac hypnic jerks or sleep starts, all the more so that they are accompanied by sensations of falling, but also acceleration and ascent. As with the moment of entering and leaving the lucid dream, there is a symmetrical portrayal of what may be compared to such starts, one at the onset of the Dreamer's vision and one towards its end. In the first account, just as the despairing Dreamer, longing for his lost and missing *Perle*, is wandering on a garden's meadow, he suddenly falls down onto *floury flaght*, flowery turf. Even if we assume that it represents the grave of the daughter he mourns, the fall is clearly recognizable and it is followed by the onset of the dream cited above (ll. 61–64):

My wreched wylle in wo ay wraghte.
I felle upon that floury flaght –

Suche odour to my hernes schot,
I slode upon a slepyng-slaghte
On that precios perle wythouten spot.

(56–60; *Pearl* 1996: 3)

The drop is sudden and the sleep that follows is deep. It is, in fact, described in terms of a blow as it is *slepyng-slaghte*, cognate with something little short of "slaughter by sleep". Both the suddenness of the slump and the yielding to sleep, followed immediately after by the beginning of the dream vision, bring to mind a literary rendition of a hypnic jerk.

We witness a similar situation towards the poem's end, which is then related to the suddenness of the jerk that denotes the somatic reaction associated with a rapid return to the state of wakefulness. As the Dreamer is about to cross the river that separates him from the Maiden and the land of those who are united with the Lamb, he comes awake just as he is about to plunge into the stream. Again, the narrative element of the unfulfilled leap and the unexpected change of the scenery and the unexpected change of the state of dream into wakefulness appear reminiscent of a hypnic jerk:

For ryght as I sparred unto the bonc,
That braththe out of my drem me brayde.
Then wakned I in that erber wlonk;
My hede upon that hylle was layde
Ther as my perle to grounde strayd.
I raxled and fel in gret affray,
And sykyng to myself I sayd:
"Now al be to that Prynces paye."

(1169–1176; *Pearl* 1996: 45)

The two passages, one related to the falling asleep, the other to "falling" out of sleep, may be discussed both in terms of psychosomatic behaviour – the Dreamer is describing his somatic reaction experienced while about to start dreaming and to awaken – and in the terms in which a hypnic start is characterized by contemporary somnology.

The third and final for this paper instance of a parasomnia in *Pearl*, the sleep paralysis, as has been observed in the initial part of this enquiry, often accompanies lucid dreams and hypnic jerks. It is the unnerving sensation of inability to act in a half-dreamy, half-wakeful state, often paired with hypnagogic or hypnopompic hallucinations superimposed on the waking reality. On a large scale, *Pearl* is, arguably, a theological and existential exploration of the necessity to comprehend and accept the human sense of paralysis: the Dreamer is ultimately powerless in his attempts at reaching the speaking Maiden and, on a different level, also hopelessly

incapable to acknowledge the spiritual sense of the loss he is suffering. From the perspective of sleep disorders, the entire dream vision resembles parasomniac sleep paralysis and such a point may be bolstered by comparing the figure of the Maiden to a succubus. However far-fetched it may sound, for, obviously, no kind of sexual relation could be inscribed into the relationship between the Maiden and the Dreamer and since the apparition is clearly not a demonic being, the Maiden is a positively distressing figure, whose very presence casts the Dreamer into the state of bitter-sweet anguish. Nevertheless, even if this way of seeing sleep paralysis in *Pearl* can be hardly defended, the poem does not lack instances of incapacity, which act as its important narrative ingredients. The symmetrically located scenes of wanting to cross the river may be interpreted as denoting such parasomniac moments. The frustration of the Dreamer is evident there and so is his ineptitude as he is trying to find a crossing:

> To fynde a forthe faste con I fonde;
> Bot wothes mo iwysse ther ware
> The fyrre I stalked by the stronde.
> And ever me thoght I shulde not wonde
> For wo ther weles so wynne wore.
>
> (150–154; *Pearl* 1996: 7)

Similarly frustrating is the second attempt to ford the river that ultimately brings the sudden awakening of the Dreamer at the poem's end. Distinctively, that very moment is combined with a hypnic jerk, which follows soon after and which was cited above:

> To fech me bur and take me halte,
> And to start in the strem schulde non me stere,
> To swymme the remnaunt, thagh I ther swalte.
> Bot of that munt I was bitalt;
> When I schulde start in the strem astraye,
> Out of that caste I was bycalt.
>
> (1158–1163; *Pearl* 1996: 44)

The impossibility to perform that which in the waking world is usually achievable is reminiscent of the experience of somatic incapacity in dreams characteristic of sleep paralysis.

In conclusion, all the comparisons between the narrative structure of *Pearl* and parasomniac experience presented above may be summarized into several closing remarks. Firstly, it is evident that the parasomnias discussed clinically by modern medicine find their counterparts in post-classical and medieval dream-books and dream commentaries. It is also apparent that such parasomniac experience was

not only noted by dream commentators but was linked to apparitions, visions and various other prophetic and admonitory forms. Secondly, the narrative nature of dreams made the dream vision an especially popular medieval literary genre. And since the essence of the dream vision lies in its use of the heightened state of consciousness that dreaming implies as well as in the use of the dream as a mode of supernal communication, medieval dream visions naturally resort to fantastic elements, which, in turn, are manifested in them in the ways and moments that resemble parasomniac experience. Lastly, the study of such parasomniac and psychosomatic elements in *Pearl* has demonstrated the narrative importance of the details that bear the marks of parasomnias, the fact that these details are crucial for the narrative development of the poem, and that they are especially denotative of its admonitory importance.

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